Małgorzata Bobowska

Remembering Historical Violence: The Role of Photography in the Japanese Canadian Community and in Joy Kogawa's Obasan

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Małgorzata Bobowska
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

REMEMBERING HISTORICAL VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE JAPANESE CANADIAN COMMUNITY AND IN JOY KOGAWA'S *OBASAN*

Abstract

One of the ways of remembering the forgotten is to reflect upon the past with the aid of photographs. As the community of Japanese Canadians, especially the Issei, tried for a long time to silence their experience, for the following generations, photographs have served as an evidence of the historical violence and provided them with an access to the past of their ancestors. Photographs seem to encapsulate time and influence the way families are perceived and remembered. Furthermore, they also have an impact on the female identity of Japanese Canadian women who suffered from the loss and dispersal of their families during the Second World War. The meaning of family photographs is also reflected in Joy Kogawa's novel *Obasan*, a novel about thirty-six years old Naomi Nakane, who as a child went through the internment experience and suffered a loss of her mother. Living with her uncle and aunt, she unearths her memories and slowly comes to terms with her past and racial identity. Photographs have a symbolic meaning for her because through the act of watching them, Naomi narrates her memories conjured up by these images, which helps her to break her silence.

Résumé

L'une des façons de se souvenir de l'oubli est de réfléchir sur le passé à l'aide des photographies. Alors que la communauté des Canadiens d'origine japonaise, en particulier les Issei, a essayé pendant longtemps de faire taire l'expérience de ses membres, pour les générations suivantes, les photographies ont servi de preuve de la violence historique et leur ont fourni un accès au passé de leurs ancêtres. Les photographies semblent encapsuler le temps et influencer la façon dont les familles

sont perçues et mémorisées. En outre, elles ont aussi un impact sur l'identité féminine des femmes canadiennes japonaises qui ont souffert de la perte et de la dispersion de leur famille pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. La signification des photos de famille se reflète également dans le roman *Obasan* de Joy Kogawa, un roman sur Naomi Nakane, âgée de trente-six ans, qui est passée dans son enfance par l'expérience de l'internement et a subi la perte de sa mère. Vivant avec son oncle et sa tante, elle déterre ses souvenirs et se réconcilie lentement avec son passé et son identité raciale. Les photographies ont une signification symbolique pour elle, parce qu'en les regardant, Naomi raconte les souvenirs évoqués par ces images, ce qui l'aide à rompre son silence. Cet article met en évidence l'emprise de la photographie sur l'identité et sur la mémoire.

"All photographs are memento mori"
(Sontag qtd. in Hirsch, *Family Frames* 17)

"Photographs that mediate memory and postmemory
in the face of monumental loss carry an emotional
weight that is often difficult to sustain."
(Hirsch, *Family Frames* 14)

Photography and memory are closely related to each other and that interrelation has been reflected upon by scholars, such as Roland Barthes and Marianne Hirsch. Photographs are believed to commemorate one's ancestors, call upon memories, and enable getting acquainted with the story of one's past. Moreover, pictures link the past and present, and thus they enable an individual to become "a character in these stories, [to] play the role of the future" (Lenzen 5). The memory which provides an individual with the possibility to reflect on their family's past in order to commemorate their relatives can be referred to as: inherited memory, ancestral memory, and blood memory, for "we are linked by blood, and blood is memory without language" (Oates qtd. in Lenzen 2).

1. POSTMEMORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY

The term which seems to be the most accurate in reference to multi-generational memory of the Japanese minority in Canada is the term postmemory, originally coined by Marianne Hirsch in order to describe the children of the Holocaust victims, who were brought up "in the shadow of

stories about the events that occurred before they were even born" (Gajewska 58). Therefore, postmemory "designates the relationship of the generations that follow survivors and witnesses of historical or collective traumatic events to these experiences. These events are internalized and 'remembered' indirectly through stories, images, and other reminders and remainders of their family's experiences" (Hirsch, "Feminism" 106-07).

Basically, postmemory is a term defined in reference to a "relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, "Feminism" 103). Unlike memory and history based on personal recollections and flashbacks, postmemory "characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation" (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 22), thus making it possible to feel the connection with a deceased relative (Lenzen 4). Hirsch's theory is actually concerned with how later generations empathize and deal with the burden of their deceased family members' traumatic memories (Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield 174). As Hirsch defines it, "it is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as one's own, or, more precisely, as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life-story" ("Projected Memory" 9). Moreover, she refers to memory as something that is cultural and collective, for "memory is not something we have, but something we produce as individuals sharing a culture" (Van Alphen qtd. in Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield 175). Nevertheless, postmemory does not only allude to direct victims of particular traumatic episodes, but it is actually "a memory repeated and borrowed, acquiring the aspect of myth-creation, embracing modern culture in which the voice and testimony of the victims are replaced by the monumentalism of the past" (Gajewska 58), thus forming the post-traumatic culture (LaCapra 195).

Photographs do not only reflect the scenery in front of the camera, but they are also, as Hirsch asserts, "the fragmentary sources and building blocks of the work of postmemory" (*Family Frames* 23). Hence, it is like a mirror of memory, and pictures might have a long-lasting emotional effect on the holder, for they connect the first- and second-generation ways of remembering, and they thereby "affirm the past's existence" (Gratton 2). As Roland Barthes discerns in *Camera Lucida*, photographs possess a force which might evoke a true essence of one's ancestors. Barthes actually asserts that the photograph can be considered a true reflection of the past, which enables the viewer to connect it with the present:

> The realists of whom I am one . . . do not take the photograph for a copy of reality, but for an emanation of past reality: a magic, not an art. . . . The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation. (88-89; ellipses in orig.)

Furthermore, Barthes claims that a photograph is "not only . . . never, in essence, a memory . . . but it actually blocks memory, [and] quickly becomes a counter-memory" (9; 2nd ellipsis in orig.), which is formed on the basis of postmemory consisting of identity and individual experience (Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield 175). As defined by George Lipsitz:

> counter-memory is a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. . . . Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from the dominant narratives. But unlike myths that seek to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces the revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past. (213)

Moreover, "the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially, . . . [and] cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, [for] it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope" (Barthes 4-5). Thus, it can be assumed that "a memory is more sensation than image" (Lenzen 9), and that a photograph might exceed a spontaneous act of remembering (Batchen 15), for it might conjure up particular smell, feel, touch, or taste.

2. FAMILY FOLKLORE AND THE FORMATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

It is believed that when compiled in the family album, photographs become a family folklore and serve as a way of storytelling. According to Richard Chalfen, "the family album is a site of cross-generational exchange and cultural continuity" (qtd. in Langford 4). Not only are they known to express the hallmarks of a particular family, but they manifest various experiences of the kin, and they unearth "moments of tension or conflict in favour of a grander narrative of integration and connectedness" (Lenzen 12). What is more, it is known that "as a social practice, photography is one of the family's primary instruments of self-knowledge and representation — the means by which family memory is continued and perpetuated, by which the family story

is henceforth told" (McAllister 87). Besides, images are also believed to serve the purpose of storing heart-breaking memories, especially when they become tokens of a distant past. The photographic archive influences one's imagination, thus enabling fantasies about the people depicted to take form. In the next step, photographs transfigure into counter-memorials, and thus they memorialize and honour the people depicted in them, ipso facto forming a collective memory of a particular, unified community (Lenzen 15-16). As observed by Maurice Halbwachs, "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is the individuals as group members who remember. It is of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located within a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past" (2).

Collective memory is also known to shape the past in order to maintain continuity and enable the connection of individuals to various communities because it is actually "in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories. Society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other" (Doss 6). However, the characteristics of traditional memorials include stillness and "never evolving forms that instead of triggering and honouring memory, stifle and dilute it so that it becomes unrecognizable to future generations who come looking for it" (Young qtd. in Lenzen 18). Likewise, photographs are also never changing, and they are "always invisible: [it is not them] that we see" (Barthes 6). Actually, their "flat two-dimensionality" suggests the "unbridgeable distance" of the past (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 5). Thus, the "imaginative investment" and metaphorization, which are essential in order to discern the relationship between the past and memory, empower them and make them "belated rather than direct, and haunted rather than empty" (Gratton 2). Therefore, in the same way as monuments, photographs "exist to remember for you" (Lenzen 20) and commemorate the deceased family members. Moreover, the "imaginative investment" enables the metaphorization of one's own memory through the memory of the other, and thus many relatives of the trauma survivors engage in "postmemorial life-writing" (Gratton 2), which appears in various genres, such as autobiography, biography, and "autofiction."

Autobiographical photo-works are characterized by the use of juxtaposition. Such technique is helpful especially in the analysis of personal photos in relation to photographs of other people found in archives or in the media. Not only does juxtaposition place personal photos in a broader context, but "juxtaposing personal and other photos can produce startling and illuminating insights into one's own family photos and the relationship between personal and collective memory" (Tinkler 69). Thus, it is believed

that even through the exploration of similarities between photographs, it is not possible to sketch one communal story, but rather:

> the powerful gaze of familiarity which imposes and perpetuates certain conventional images of the familial, which "frames" the family, [and enables family members to] identify [their] own familial gaze, which is different for every culture and historical moment. Within a given cultural context, the camera and the family album function as the instruments of this familial gaze. (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 11)

The history of the Japanese community in Canada and its experience of the internment provide an insight into the complex modes of transmitting memories to later generations. According to Coslett, Lury, and Summerfield, such catastrophic memories, secluded from public knowledge for so long, might be difficult to be fused into one collective memory, especially when social indifference and amnesia are taken into account (174). "Given generational change, migration and assimilation policies, collective memory is not ready-made and transmitted whole within a community but is produced with difficulty and dialogically between oral testimonies and later listeners" (174).

3. JAPANESE CANADIAN PHOTOGRAPHY NARRATIVES

3.1. Archives of Memory

The exploration of the Japanese Canadian family pictures shows that their memories are a part of the collective memory of the community. Indeed, as stated by Mieke Bal, trauma "must be integrated into memory and worked through in the present, and the exchange between a witness and a victim of trauma sets the emergence of the narrative into motion" (qtd. in Kunimoto 147). Hence, testimonials serve as roads to recovery, and family albums are like storybooks, which open the possibility of narration "as long as there are more pages to be turned" (Kunimoto 148). Many scholars, such as Lorie Novak or Kirsten McAllister, have been attached to the photographs of their families and have analysed their postmemory in relation to pictures of other clans sharing the same historical experience. An account of McAllister, who is Japanese-Canadian, shows how her way of the perception of pictures altered and evolved after studying photographs of other Japanese Canadian families. In fact, "[b]y studying the photos of other families, McAllister was able to confront signs of distress she could not initially face in her own family album" (Tinkler 69).

In "A Story of Escape," McAllister recalls her visit to the archive, where:

> thousands of lives were condensed into flat surfaces. As an unknown historical landscape began to emerge, there was an eerie sense of dislocation. It was as if I had been absorbed into a murky spectral world of images wandering ghost-like through the present. . . . These images seemed to hold the potential to conjure up anew . . . disintegrated unities of once intact modes of living. (83; 2nd ellipsis in orig.)

Even though the pictures from the archive were separated from their social contexts, personal memories made them real and significant (McAllister 83), for "the family photograph can reduce the strains of family life by sustaining an imagery of cohesion, even as it exacerbates them by creating images that real families cannot uphold" (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 7). McAllister's point of view was also influenced by Ana Chang, who put together three photographs taken in different periods of time, and thus a sharp contrast between the pre-war and wartime reality created a "synchronic shock, [for] discrete moments once separated by time and space were collapsed into one visual moment" (McAllister 97). What is more, the shock might also be connected with a poignant quality of photographs because, according to Kuhn, "in seizing a moment in time, [they] always assume loss in the very hope they attempt to instil. [Thus, they] look towards a future time when things will be different, [and] anticipate a need to remember what will soon be past" (17).

3.2. War-Time Hardships, the Split of Families, and the Meaning of Photography

The years of 1939-1945, which mark the Second World War, were the years of the split identity for the Japanese Canadian diaspora. Not only did they question their sense of belonging, but they were also prohibited from engaging in art, and therefore any visual forms of art and capturing memories became "a projected battleground" (Kunimoto 129). Even though the War Measures Act issued in 1941 by the Canadian government stipulated that all the people of Japanese origin were to be interned, the experience of Japanese Canadians varied among the displaced people and families, for class affiliations and luck also played a key role in the extent to which particular families were affected by the ubiquitous racism. As their personal possessions were taken away and sold, they were also not able to keep their treasured photographs, for they were expropriated as a proof of disloyalty to Canada. Thus, many precious pictures were burnt by the family members themselves, who preferred to destroy them instead of leaving them for other people, most probably the ones

who were preoccupied with harassing Canadians of Asian origin. New photographs were not to be taken: the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) stated even before the internment that Japanese Canadians were not allowed to use cameras and short-wave radios. The notion of the yellow peril was being instilled in the public imagination and disseminated through newspaper editorials, political cartoons, and pictures (Kunimoto 129). However, a fighting spirit and the creativity of many Japanese Canadians led to inventive evasion of the prohibition, and thus some people of the Japanese origin were still illicitly engaging in photography and left a legacy of pictures which have become an image of collective history depicting the trauma and hardships caused by the relocation policy in Canada (132).

It is believed that one of the toughest aspects of the war-time policy that Japanese Canadians had to cope with was the family segregation and sending particular family members to roadwork camps, which led to the immense pain of exile and, very often, the breakdown of family units. After having been shipped to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia, Japanese Canadians were further displaced to sugar beet farms, areas in the east, or sent back to war-ravaged Japan (Kunimoto 133). Hence, families could not function in the way they used to any longer. Not only was the income not provided by the male breadwinner, but it was no longer possible to eat together, for families were forced to share the allotted quarters with other families, or they were split and put into different residences. Thereby, the loss of community ties was inevitable, and it is known that younger Nisei tended to find solace by befriending people from relocation centres. As both the regulations of the Canadian government and an overall atmosphere of chaos resulting from uprooting people contributed to the inability of keeping in touch with family and friends, creative ways of "concentrically framing one's community (and the family within it)" (133) were essential. Thus, photography served as a way of connecting with the loved ones and enabled the overwhelmed Japanese Canadians to "re-centre themselves within a seemingly stable, yet imaginary, network of relations" (133).

Family photographs and albums started to be something even more than a memory to be held dear: they served as an emanation of communal belonging and family stability. In other words, they were used to "foster a sense of place, and to authenticate a seemingly cohesive biography" (Kunimoto 134). As the referents depicted in the pictures were far away, family albums were given more significance because they "[idealized] what was out of reach and, . . . through the course of nostalgia, [they heightened] desire for the past" (134). Moreover, they allowed the displaced individuals to fantasize about their families. Nevertheless, in order for the photograph to transcend its silence and stillness, it is essential to create a narrative, a "metaphoric exchange between

the representation and its possessor," also known as a "photo-narrative" (131). It is formed through the entwinement of personal memories and the facts depicted in the picture. Therefore, the photographs taken by Japanese Canadians can be regarded as a gradual transformation of collective memory into private photo-narratives, as well as from a personal photo-narrative into accounts which went down in history.

While going through hard times of uncertainty and powerlessness, family photographs gave war victims an incentive to endure the gratuitous prejudice with dignity and persistence. The majority of the photographs that survived now belong to the Nikkei National Museum in Burnaby, British Columbia (Kunimoto 132). Among them, we can find, for instance, the photographs taken by J. T. Izumi, a former professional photographer from Powell Street, which represent families posing for the studio portrait. Izumi was actually left unemployed due to the regulation which banned Japanese Canadians from using cameras, but his equipment was returned after he was relocated. However, it was not possible in the internment camps to take pictures of the same quality as in the studio, and thus his works, which varied in lighting, no longer served as a showcase of his skills.

Previously, a playful formality was a characteristic feature of Izumi's photographs, but the pictures dating back to the 1940s clearly show changes in family relations imposed by the war-time regulations. In one of the familial portraits of an anonymous group of five taken at a relocation site in British Columbia,[1] the relationship between the group of people remains unknown. The picture shows a little girl clad in winter-style clothes, who seems to be too young for being a daughter of the man and the woman between whom she is sitting. Moreover, two other girls standing in the back are not standing close to each other, and the background consisting of a tar and paper wall serves as a reminder of the bad standard of relocation camps. The photograph was also taken outside, for there was not enough space and light inside the shacks, and thus the subjects "posed on frozen ground outside a makeshift home, the awkwardness of the de-centred picture speaks poignantly of its departure from the earlier idealized images of the contained family unit" (Kunimoto 138).

Similarly, the picture of the Okada family found by McAllister signifies changes which the internment imposed on the Japanese Canadian families (see fig. 1). In fact, the most prominent character in the photograph is the father, whose face expresses his sense of authority. Nevertheless, the picture actually points to the hardships that men had to cope with during the war years. Not only were they sent to roadwork camps, but they were also unemployed,

[1] The picture of an unknown family that I am describing here can be found in Kunimoto 136.

which contributed to the feeling of failure in sustaining their families. Thus, the family most probably had to rely on young daughters, who are depicted as standing in the background and smiling. Also, two "camp babies" can be seen in the picture, the age of whom suggests that neither the son nor the grand-son is absent. Moreover, the tension can be observed in the picture. The two daughters standing in the back are the only members of the family who smile, and one of the girls seems to turn away from her sister in order to look at the father. Therefore, even though the picture resembles a conventional family portrait, as McAllister states, "with the parents in the centre, older children supportively surrounding them and the younger children in the front, it also suggests a drama of family exclusions and emotional factions: mother and oldest boy; father and youngest boy; one daughter isolated but still looking over her parents" (86). Although the composition might stem from the instructions of the photographer, such as to stand closer or look towards the father, the result shows that "the conventions of family photography can no longer make members perform as a unified unit, [for] the photograph cannot contain the tensions, shame and anxieties of life in the camps" (86).

Fig. 1. The Okada family in front of tar paper shack in Tashme 1943 (Courtesy: Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre NNM 1994-45-5).[2]

[2] Permission for the use of the photographs (fig. 1 and 2) was obtained from Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre on September 21, 2016.

Another picture found by McAllister shows an extraordinarily big family (as for the standards of the camps), which seems to be a strong unit (see fig. 2). Japanese Canadian families were allowed to reunite only if they decided to leave Canada, and thus the image actually conjures up a massive expulsion of families to war-ravaged Japan, in spite of the fact that the family from the picture remained in Canada (McAllister 91).

Fig. 2. The Homma Family in Slocan Valley 1945 (Courtesy: Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre NNM 1994-45-5).

The pictures taken in the internment camps hardly show appalling conditions and state surveillance, for they were taken in the times of persecution (Kunimoto 141). Most albums also do not include any indication of distress connected with being war-torn and separated from one's family. They show neither material nor emotional problems related to incarceration (McAllister 82). In fact, the majority of Japanese Canadians captured only happy memories in order not to show humiliation (McAllister 90). The picture of Marie Katsuno, who was relocated to Tashme, a place which was merely open space before the war,[3] shows her with a friend, and their grinning faces may suggest a heart-warming memory.[4] However, the photograph was taken away from the view of the camp, in front of snowy forest. Later, it was put together with three other pictures, and a signature "Tashme Home" was added. The inscription suggests that "it was not an enduring place, [that] there have been

[3] The name of the place pertains to the surnames of the three BCSC commissioners: Taylor, Shirras, and Mead (Kunimoto 140).

[4] The picture representing Marie Katsuno with a friend can be found in Kunimoto 139.

other homes in the past and will be in the future, and that within the space of the album, home can be folded up and tucked away" (Kunimoto 139-40). It also points to the notion of community, which was imagined through the use of personal memory and photography.

Contrary to Katsuno's album, the album of Mary Ohara, who was separated from her relatives in the New Denver Sanatorium, was filled with traumatic memories, for it was compiled after she returned to Japan. Her personal recollections mingle with the anonymity of relocations, and therefore the two photographs, which can be found in her album, portray rows of shacks located in the Slocan Valley and evoke the feeling of nostalgia. In fact, photographs are for Ohara like treasured objects, as they were all she had after going back to Japan (Kunimoto 151). Furthermore, rather than being an exact depiction of hardships and trauma, the pictures mirror more acute adversities connected with the war experience, and thus they open a possibility of the formation of photo-narrative. Indeed, her reminiscences point out that both traumatic and narrative memory exist, and thus it might be observed that albums "play a strong role in attempts to come to terms with personal and communal trauma, even before the victim has mastery over the traumatic episodes" (Kunimoto 151). The fact that life in the camps certainly did not consist of fortunate moments can be observed on the basis of the haiku found by McAllister together with a picture. The Japanese characters used there signify 'emptiness,' 'harshness,' and 'perseverance,' and the poem "echoes moments literally frozen in memory, painfully expressing the opposite of appearances":

> Springtime in ghost town among mountains
> Snow deep (qtd. in McAllister 105)

Photographs may also evoke painful memories, which can be regarded as a destructive force, as in the case of the New Denver sanatorium patients, who were forced to stay there for an extended period of time, separated from their families. Some of them, like Shirley Omatsu, spent six years away from their residence. Hence, Japanese Canadians still remain hesitant to decide whether pictures of collective trauma should be made public and used as a commemoration of history. Moreover, many issues that the war victims had to deal with were silenced and are not visible in the pictures, so that they may not serve as an account of conditions in the internment sites. Although many albums were donated to the Nikkei National Museum, many are also kept aloof from the public knowledge, for they "could cause too many repercussions" (Kunimoto 152). Nevertheless, all of the pictures speak of both resilience and perseverance, and wounds, which still have not healed.

Family pictures, therefore, serve as a way of filling the void of the irretrievable, and the fact that many treasured photographs were given to the Nikkei National Museum suggests that their meaning is not only existent in the objects themselves, but it is rather reshaped in various narratives created by its viewers (Kunimoto 153). Photographs taken in the camps are also known to depict a failure of hope, and thus they are believed to reflect the "social death" (McAllister 99) imposed on the Japanese Canadian community by the Canadian government. However, at the same time, they capture Japanese Canadians' attempts not to surrender to the policies issued by the government, and therefore they indicate a will to preserve unity and continuity between the pre-war and war times (McAllister 106). Even though pictures cannot camouflage painful memories of the Second World War, through the employment of personal narratives, they serve as "visual texts that circulate between private domain of individual homes and the public domain of the archive" (McAllister 83), and they are an inseparable part of the Japanese Canadian diaspora's collective memory.

4. SNAPSHOTS AS "SEGMENTS OF STORIES": THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN JOY KOGAWA'S *OBASAN*

The meaning of family photograph is also reflected in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, a novel about thirty-six years old Naomi Nakane, who as a child went through the internment experience, and suffered a loss of her mother who suddenly disappeared. Living with her uncle and aunt, she reflects on her past, and the pictures of her family help her to unearth her memories and enable her to come to terms with her past and racial identity. In relation to *Obasan*, the term ekphrastic photography is of prime importance. As defined by Heffernan, ekphrasis is "the verbal representation of visual representation, [which] explicitly represents representation itself" (3). Therefore, just like photography, ekphrasis is a mode of representation that assumes that the subject depicted "can never be present, but must be conjured up as a potent absence or a fictive, figural present in order to preserve the genre-based integrity of the ekphrastic text" (Mitchell 158). As Klomhaus-Hracs states, in the case of photography regarded through an ekphrastic approach, both the picture and the person depicted in it are imagined by the reader, and thus they become more and more realistic with each reading of the text. Hence, in the ekphrastic text about a photograph, "both the object and its subject are realized through the description of a single picture" (Klomhaus-Hracs 127).

4.1. Family Photograph as a Reflection of the Family's Place in Canadian Society

In her novel, Kogawa creates an ekphrastic text by providing a detailed description of a family photograph. What is more, the ekphrastic passages make the photographs important for the characters. Thus, there is a unique relationship between Naomi and her family's photographs, which have a symbolic meaning for her (Klomhaus-Hracs 128). Moreover, photography becomes both "the object and the mode of the description, uniting the visual and the verbal through fiction" (Klomhaus-Hracs 129). Family photographs are also believed to mirror the "racialized subjectivity" of the protagonist and her family dominated by the white society (Sprout 77). As the members of Naomi's family were victims of the historical violence, e.g. her mother would not have died if it had not been for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and her family would not have been dispersed if it had not been for the regulations of the Canadian government, an access to family photographs enables her to understand her female relatives more profoundly and to find solace in the fact that she has an access to their past.

It is generally agreed by the critics that the family photographs in *Obasan* have a normative function and demonstrate the social position and expectations of the family. For instance, the family portrait described by Naomi is situated above the piano, and it is put in a silver frame. As stated by Sprout (80), the fact that there is a piano in Naomi's aunt's house suggests that before the war, the family led a comfortable life, and that back in Japan, the family members were a part of the cultured community, especially in the case of Obasan, who used to be a distinguished koto player and taught music after coming to Canada (Kogawa 22). Therefore, the silver frame, together with its placement above the piano, function as a reminder of the family's place within Canadian society (Sprout 80).

According to Heffernan, an ekphrasis is also a figure that "evokes the power of the silent image even as it subjects that power to the rival authority of language" (1; also qtd. in Sprout 83). Therefore, family photographs evoke a power typically related to silence, which is emphasized by the fact that most of the family members present in the pictures are deceased. Hence, Naomi has to combine the verbal and the visual, which together provide her with the story about her family (Sprout 84). Nevertheless, it is thought that in her position of the visible minority, through the act of watching photographs, Naomi narrates her memories conjured up by the images, and thus she gives voice to the silence. Moreover, family photographs are also believed to "disrupt a familiar narrative about family life and its representations, [for] they locate themselves

precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life" (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 8). Nonetheless, as also noted by Sprout (85), it is possible only "in the context of this meta-photographic textuality and in this self-conscious contextuality" (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 8). For instance, the photograph which was taken before the relocation of the Japanese Canadian families depicts the myth of the perfect family and, as an exemplification of ekphrasis, reflects the hegemonic structure of the family which "demanded racialized subjects conform to its standards, while, at the same time, exposing their difference" (Sprout 86).

Photographs are known to be a reflection of an idealized past and of frozen time. Moreover, photographs show the dichotomy between the reality of experience and the static unreality of the pictures, for on the one hand they "furnish evidence," and on the other hand they "freeze, and falsify the fleeting moment" (Sontag 5). Thereby, the picture which shows a pose of the family at the christening of Stephen, the first grandchild, shows that the family appears to be assimilated into the white society and conforms to its traditions, i.e. adapts to the dominant, Christian religion. Even though the members of the family are denied more and more rights, belonging to the Christian community is important for them. Family photographs also constitute the "imperilled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life" (Sontag 9). However, what Naomi sees is challenged by the reality of her experiences, and thus she does not entirely believe the photographs. She discerns that "[the family members] look rather humourless, but satisfied with the attention of the camera and its message for the day that all is well. That forever and ever all is well. But it isn't of course. Even my eleven-year-olds know that you can't capture life's precious moments . . . in the camera ads" (Kogawa 24). The experience that she recollects is opposite to an ideal image of the family photographs, for, as stated by Phu, "[they] offer the possibility of constructing out of the unsaid a narrative of togetherness" (121).

In spite of the fact that the picture shows the seemingly stable position of the family in Canadian society, Naomi's grandparent' affiliation with the Judeo-Christian religion suggests that becoming a member of Canadian society was at the cost of becoming Other to remaining family members and the members of the community. As Sprout asserts, such visual epistemology makes Naomi defamiliarize her own family, and thus she starts seeing them as alien (86). Thus, while describing the picture, Naomi starts to focus on her loved ones' grotesque features. For instance, she describes her grandfather as a short person whose boots thus "angle down like a ballet dancer's," and her grandmother is described as having "nostrils wide in her startled bony face" (Kogawa 21). Her grandmother and grandfather "look straight ahead, carved and rigid, with their expressionless Japanese faces and their bodies pasted over

with Rule Britannia" (Kogawa 22). Moreover, she describes her grandparents as "sitting like an advance guard forming a brigade," her grandpa's hand, "like a Napoleon's, in his vest" (Kogawa 21). Such military metaphors reflect the fact that her grandparents tried to hide their Japanese origin by showing their loyalty to Canada. Furthermore, the viewing of the family portrait is also associated with silence and a "word-image dichotomy" (Sprout 90), which links pictures with voicelessness. Even though the picture suggests that Naomi's family was visible as a part of the minority, the silence actually makes it invisible. Moreover, it can be said that the voice is given to dominant, white families. Therefore, Naomi's meta-photographic textuality revives the visibility of her family, thus showing that "word and image, voice and visibility are exhorted to work cooperatively to contest a hegemonic familial ideology, rather than simply struggle against each other for representation" (Sprout 91).

4.2. Ekphrasis of Photography as a Way of Reconstructing Memories

Naomi's ekphrasis shows that the "trick lenses," represented by the restless eyes of the neighbour who visits Aunt Obasan (Kogawa 267), are present in her life and constantly align her with the "dominant gaze" (Sprout 87) even during her act of watching family pictures. What is more, Naomi's description of the family photograph is influenced by her postmemory, defined by Hirsch as typical for the child of survivors "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (*Family Frames* 22). Therefore, even though the image shows Japanese people with typical Asian features posing in a conventional Western way, Naomi's words provide a context for the family story, thus challenging the received representation of the family by showing that her grandparents were immersed in Western culture and the majority of their lives had been spent in Canada, rather than in Japan. Naomi's narrative also changes the way the reader perceives Obasan; for before the description of her in the picture, she tells a story of Obasan giving birth to two still-born children. Thus, Obasan's pain is visible in "an exquisite tenderness in [her] slanted eyes, a smile more sad than demure" (Kogawa 23).

The photograph of the family evokes the feeling of nostalgia in Obasan, for whom the picture provokes longing for "such a time [as] there was once" (Kogawa 23). Nevertheless, Naomi is more perceptive, and she is aware of the photograph's alterations. Indeed, as Obasan admits, Naomi's mother's eyes "were sketched in by the photographer because she was always blinking when

pictures were being taken" (Kogawa 23), and Aunt Emily was probably suggested not to wear glasses for the picture in order to appear more attractive (Sprout 89). Therefore, Naomi starts to mediate Obasan's nostalgia, and she recollects Obasan's words that Grandma Kato used to go to Japan frequently with her mother, leaving Aunt Emily and Grandpa Kato behind, which make her think if "the Katos were ever really a happy family" (Kogawa 24). Moreover, Naomi ponders upon the struggle of the racially minorized families in a hierarchical dominant society. Even though she admits that the members of her family "were the original togetherness people," she also reveals that, at the beginning, Grandpa Kato opposed the marriage of Naomi's parents, which was "the first non-arranged . . . in the community" (Kogawa 24). Nevertheless, it was her parents, who "like two needles, knit the families carefully into one blanket" (Kogawa 25). The portrait of the family, taken at Stephen's christening also reflects the promise of the first grandson's future and expectations of the members of the two families. However, as Naomi comments by looking at the photograph through her postmemory lense: while Stephen's birth was the beginning of "all the picnics at Kitsilano, and the concerts at Stanley Park, . . . others disappear from the earth without a whimper" (Kogawa 25). According to Sprout, Naomi's remark is related to the relocation experience of the internment camps her family had to face during the war years (90). On top of that, it pertains to the mysterious disappearance of her mother.

The family portrait of the christening of Stephen also serves as a reminiscence of the moment of Naomi's getting to terms with her father's death. When her classmate, Penny, visits her, she notices the photograph and states that the figure in the picture whom Naomi calls her father "doesn't look like [him]" (Kogawa 252). Moreover, Naomi says that "the Barkers and everyone else have assumed that Uncle and Obasan are our parents and we've never bothered to correct them" (252). Thus, for the first time in her life, Naomi admits that her father is dead, but "a few moments after that, [she finds herself] collapsed on the sofa with a sharp pain in [her] abdomen and a cold perspiration forming on [her] forehead" (252). Moreover, there is a gap between word and image because, among "the few framed photographs on the kitchen sideboard," there is a "small black-and-white snapshot of a graveyard scene," and she knows that her father was "buried by a few friends in the spring of 1950 following an extensive operation at the New Denver hospital" (253). The moment of admitting her father's death is very emotional for her, and she feels "a strange shock as if [she was] telling a monstrous lie, [when she actually hears herself] talking" (250). Therefore, Naomi's reconciliation with her father's death suggests, as Sprout observes, that "the words can be also silent" (92), and that the words cannot fully convey everything that the photograph holds.

With the use of photographs, Naomi also tries to reconstruct her disappeared mother, which involves the work of her postmemory, defined by Hirsch as familial but not autobiographical recollections that children absorb from their parents (*Family Frames* 8). These recollections are embodied in family photographs, which capture the relationship of the trauma survivors' children with the experiences of their parents, and the experiences that they remember only as the stories with which they grew up, but which are "so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, "Projected Memory" 8). However, while comparing her mother with Aunt Emily, Naomi notices that her mother's presence was fragile, "her face oval as an egg and delicate," while Aunt Emily was "not a beauty but, one might say, solid and intelligent-looking" (Kogawa 23). She cannot identify with her mother, and thus it might be said that she is "dis-located, metaphorically placed in the rubble of a disintegrated narrative/family home" (Jones 217).

The blurry picture is the only item which holds the memory of her mother. With the passing of time, she finds it more and more difficult to relate to the picture: "Only fragments relate me . . . to this young woman, my mother, and me, her infant daughter. Fragments of fragments. Parts of a house. Segments of stories" (Kogawa 64). However, as Phu asserts, the act of watching pictures:

> [not only provides] Naomi with an access to memory but also, indeed, in the creative, reconstituting development of photography, analogizes memory itself. Studying the photo of her childhood self and her long-lost mother, Naomi muses on the unassailable distance between her present and the past that she mourns, that the photo conjures up. (124)

Likewise, when Naomi sees a photograph in which she is clinging to her mother's leg when she is two or three years old, she feels disconnected from it and remembers the person who is not captured in the picture, namely a boy staring at her when the photograph was being taken. Therefore, Naomi recalls her being a child and conjures up "both a child's recollection and a recollection of childhood" (Gottlieb 38). It also evokes in her the feeling of trauma:

> I am mortified by the attention. I turn my face away from everyone. My mother places her cool hand on my cheek, its scent light and flowery. She whispers that the boy will laugh at me if I hide. Laugh? There is no worse horror. Laughter is a cold spray that chills the back of my neck that makes the tears rush to my eyes. My mother's whisper flushes me out of my hiding place behind the softness of her silk dress. Only the sidewalk is safe to look at. It does not have eyes. (Kogawa 57)

All in all, as ekphrasis in Greek literally means speaking out (Sprout 103), the family portraits help Naomi to contexualize her family, who suffered dispersal due to the historical violence imposed on the family members, and whose stories had been silenced for Naomi until her adulthood. What is more, as Phu states, "the representation of photographs makes explicit the uneasy intimacy between official history and memory in an intimacy dramatized through Obasan's frequent return to the family photo album in response to Naomi's questions about the past" (121). Furthermore, as the snapshots constitute only "fragments of fragments . . . segments of stories" (Kogawa 57), photographs provide only a background for the storytelling and are one of the tools that Naomi has to use in order to reconcile with her past.

Likewise, the collective memory of the Japanese Canadian community is comprised of many components, including stories and photographs. In spite of the fact that Japanese Canadians started to face discrimination soon after they had arrived in Canada in 1877, the situation of the community during the Second World War in Canada can be considered as the story of the weak and the vulnerable. Furthermore, the experience of the Second World War was silenced and endured by them with patience and dignity instilled into their minds as the concepts of *shikata ga nai* (仕方が無い, "it cannot be helped"), *gaman* (我慢, "perseverance"), *kodomo no tame ni* (子供ために, "for the sake of the children"), and Japanese stoicism. Nevertheless, testimonials and storybooks in the form of family albums have made it feasible for the members of the Japanese diaspora in Canada to explore their ancestry, break the silence, and commemorate their family members, the voices of whom were silenced but deserve to be heard and recognized in the multicultural Canadian society.

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Małgorzata Bobowska has an MA from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Her thesis, "Remembering the Forgotten: The Influence of Historical Violence on the Japanese Canadian Feminine Subjects in Roy Kiyooka's *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan, Itsuka*, and Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field, One Hundred Million Hearts*" was supervised by Professor Agnieszka Rzepa, and it was awarded by the Dean of the AMU Faculty of English as well as the Polish Association for Canadian Studies. Her personal and scholarly interests include Canadian literature, Asian Canadian literature in particular, as well as Japanese culture, including Japanese history, music, and cuisine.